



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE


Marc Elrich
County Executive

Tiffany Ward, Director
Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice

MEMORANDUM

October 21, 2021

To: Jennifer Bryant, Director
Office of Management and Budget

From: Tiffany Ward, Director
Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice 

Re: Supplemental Appropriation: ARPA Behavior and Mental Health #22-16

- I. **FINDING:** The Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) finds that Supplemental Appropriation #22-16 is likely to advance racial equity and social justice in the County, as many of the strategies and approaches outlined in the information accompanying the request are aligned with research and practices ORESJ identified in its research. Despite this generally positive assessment, there are opportunities to strengthen the supplemental appropriation's impact by considering recommendations outlined in the background section and using disaggregated data to effectively target resources.
- II. **BACKGROUND:** Supplemental Appropriation #22-16 authorizes funding from federal American Rescue Plan (ARPA) Act of 2021 Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds to implement a program that addresses trauma and behavioral health issues exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic on students and their families. The appropriation in the amount of \$1,205,690 will support Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) in the development of a multifaceted mental health support program and will help build the capacity of staff to carry out a range of counseling and crises response interventions.

As of September 30, 2021, MCPS had a total enrollment of 160,564 students¹, operating 209² schools in the 2020-2021 school year. The majority of MCPS students are students of

¹ MCPS Data Dashboard. Learning Accountability and Results. "Enrollment: Individual Measures". Available at: <https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/data/LAR-charts/enrollment.html>

² "About MCPS". Available at: <https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/about/>

color with the following distribution by race and ethnicity: 21.8% Black/African American; 14.3% Asian; 32.8% Hispanic/Latino; 25.8% White; .1% American Indian/Alaska Native; 5% two or more races; no students reported being Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. Students in MCPS also have diverse socioeconomic characteristics and are represented in the following service groups in 2021: 16.4% were enrolled in English as a Second language (ESOL) programs; 38.7% were in Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS) programs; and 12.5% received special education instruction. Trends in MCPS student enrollment reveal that the school system has become more diverse and is largely a socioeconomic and racially segregated system³.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, students of color experienced disparities in resources, opportunities, and outcomes across educational settings (K-12 and post-secondary)⁴. These disparities are explored in a 2019 Montgomery County Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) report, *MCPS Performance and Opportunity Gaps*⁵. The report notes persistent disparities across a number of achievement performance metrics by race, ethnicity, and service group status. The analysis also explains the inequities underlying many of these disparities, describing how “concentrated poverty and segregation among MCPS schools and the under-funding of compensatory education and English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs relative to student need”⁶ shapes student opportunity.

A growing body of evidence suggests that racial, ethnic, and service group disparities have been exaggerated by the pandemic. The US Department of Education explained in a June 2021 report how the pandemic has impacted students of all ages and backgrounds, noting the following challenges for students of color, students with disabilities, and students experiencing the destabilizing effects of new or persistent financial insecurity:

- Live in households where adults are more likely to experience job losses or covid-19 exposure, creating or exaggerating economic constraints and negative health outcomes.
- Disparities in access to mental health services or the full range of academic and wrap around services that a school provides
- Barriers in access to technology or necessary supports to stay connected to school and educational opportunities.
- Amplification of language barriers for students and households with English-language learners.

³ Elaine Bonner-Tompkins. MCPS Performance and Opportunity Gaps. Report Number 2019-4. December 2019. Available at: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/2019%20Reports/OLOReport2019-14.pdf>

⁴ *Education in a Pandemic: The Disparate Impact of Covid-19 on America's Students*. US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights. June 2021. Available at: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/20210608-impacts-of-covid19.pdf>

⁵ Elaine Bonner-Tompkins.

⁶ Elaine Bonner-Tompkins.

- Disrupted educational opportunities for students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and;
- Overall, the report noted for all groups slow to non-existent recovery in academic achievement due to preexisting resource and opportunity gaps that produce disparate student performance outcomes.

In addition to education disparities affecting K-12 students and disparate health and economic impacts of the pandemic on households of color, there is mounting evidence about the toll the pandemic has taken on children's mental health. Prior to the pandemic, the mental health needs of school age children were on the rise, and Child Trends reported that Black, Latinx, and Native children experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) at disproportionately higher rates than their White and Asian peers⁷. The National Academy for State Health Policy reported that as many as half of children ages 6-17 who have mental health disorders do not receive the treatment or services they need⁸. This is due to a number of factors including isolation and loneliness related to health and safety measures—social distancing and stay-at-home orders, and financial insecurity and poor mental health of parents and caregivers⁹. KFF reports that children of color and LGBTQ+ youth may be particularly vulnerable to negative mental health outcomes during the pandemic¹⁰. Long-standing inequities in access to health insurance and quality mental health services are largely to blame. A recent study highlights these disparities and their impacts on whole families; Susan Hillis, an epidemiologist at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and lead author of the new study explained, “65% of all children experiencing Covid-associated orphan hood or death of their primary caregiver are of racial and ethnic minority”¹¹.

The Education Trust explains the importance of expanded mental health support services using ARPA dollars and advocates for targeted approaches to ensure that vulnerable and systemically neglected students are able to access needed services. The Education Trust also adds that staff development focused on trauma and behavioral health should also

⁷ Vanessa Sacks, David Murphey. Child Trends. “The prevalence of adverse childhood experiences, nationally, by state, and by race or ethnicity”. February 2018. Available at: <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/prevalence-adverse-childhood-experiences-nationally-state-race-ethnicity>

⁸ Olivia Randi. National Academy for State Health Policy. “American Rescue Plan Act Presents Opportunities for States to Support School Mental Health Systems”. August 2021. Available at: <https://www.nashp.org/american-rescue-plan-act-presents-opportunities-for-states-to-support-school-mental-health-systems/>

⁹ Nirmita Pachal, Rabah Kamal, Cynthia Cox, Rachel Garfield, Priya Chidambaram. Kaiser Family Foundation. Mental Health and Substance Use Considerations Among Children During the COVID-19 Pandemic. May 2021. Available at: <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/mental-health-and-substance-use-considerations-among-children-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

¹⁰ Nirmita Pachal, et al.

¹¹ Rhitu Chatterjee and Carmel Wroth. National Public Radio. “Covid deaths leave thousands of U.S. kids grieving parents or primary caregivers”. October 7, 2021. Available at: <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2021/10/07/1043881136/covid-deaths-leave-thousands-of-u-s-kids-grieving-parents-or-primary-caregivers>

include culturally responsive, anti-bias instructional practices¹². A Center for Law and Social Policy Analysis¹³ of 37 state Department of Education school reopening plans identified the following opportunities for addressing youth mental health: promoting a deeper focus on healing-centered care, investing in non-traditional health care providers, disaggregating data to monitor where there may be barriers to access, and creating and collaborating with student advisory councils focused on mental health.

More broadly, states are using a variety of state and federal funding streams to develop strategies for mitigating ACEs and addressing trauma during the pandemic. These strategies include raising awareness of ACEs, strengthening identification and screening tools and techniques, engaging directly with impacted communities, partnering across systems, and delivering trainings to build capacity of providers¹⁴. Strategies that center equity are more likely to effectively address disproportionate effects of Covid-19 on racially marginalized groups as well as stressors and trauma related to pre-pandemic inequities in education and healthcare and disproportionate involvement in criminal justice and welfare systems. Of note, a proposal in Arkansas would require school district board of directors to conduct ACE screenings before taking disciplinary action¹⁵. Given existing disparities in suspension rates in Montgomery County Public Schools¹⁶, this approach may support the supplemental appropriation in advancing racial equity in the County.

- III. **DATA ANALYSIS:** A Child Trends Research Brief¹⁷ from 2018 examined the prevalence of ACEs, nationally, by state, and by race and ethnicity. The following is a table recreated from the brief and illustrates racial and ethnic disparities in the prevalence of different types of ACEs. Overall, Black, Hispanic/Latino, and Other race, non-Hispanic experienced the greatest prevalence of individual ACEs, and for all ACEs had higher prevalence rates than the rates for children overall.

¹² The Education Trust. Recommendations for State Leaders to Advance Equity Using Funds from the American Rescue Plan. May 2021. Available at: <https://edtrust.org/resource/recommendations-for-state-leaders-to-advance-equity-using-funds-from-the-american-rescue-plan/>

¹³ Kayla Tawa. The Center for Law and Social Policy. "Beyond the Mask: Promotion Transformation and Healing in School Reopening". August 17, 2021. Available at: <https://www.clasp.org/publications/report/brief/beyond-mask-promoting-transformation-and-healing-school-reopening-1>

¹⁴ Rebecca Cooper. National Academy for State Health Policy. State Strategies to Mitigate Adverse Childhood Experiences during the Covid-19 Pandemic and Beyond. June 14, 2021. Available at: <https://www.nashp.org/state-strategies-to-mitigate-adverse-childhood-experiences-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-and-beyond/>

¹⁵ Rebecca Cooper.

¹⁶ Montgomery County Racial Equity Profile. Suspension rates. Pg. 35. Available at: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/2019%20Reports/RevisedOLO2019-7.pdf>

¹⁷ Vanessa Sacks, David Murphey.

Prevalence rates of individual ACEs for children by race/ethnicity								
	Hard to cover basics like food or housing somewhat or very often	Parent or guardian divorced or separated	Parent or guardian died	Parent or guardian served time in jail	Saw or heard parents or other adults slap, hit, kick, or punch in home	Victim of or witness to violence in neighborhood	Lived with anyone mentally ill, suicidal, or severely depressed	Lived with anyone with a problem with alcohol or drugs
White, non-Hispanic	22	23	3	7	5	3	9	10
Black, non-Hispanic	37	35	7	16	9	7	6	8
Asian, non-Hispanic	14	7	2	1	2	2	2	1
Other race, non-Hispanic	31	27	4	11	7	6	11	12
Hispanic	29	28	3	8	6	4	6	9
All children	25	25	3	8	6	4	8	9

Data note: Yellow shading = Percentage is higher than white non-Hispanic children at a statistically significant level. Blue shading = Percentage is lower than white non-Hispanic children at a statistically significant level. Red shading = Estimate should be interpreted with caution, because the relative confidence interval is greater than 120 percent.

Data source: the data displayed here is a recreation from data used in a Child Trends research brief from 2018. Full explanation of data used in the brief is available on page 16:

https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ACESBriefUpdatedFinal_ChildTrends_February2018.pdf

cc: Ken Hartman, Director, Strategic Partnerships, Office of the County Executive